

STEM OPT EXTENSION APPLICATION GUIDE

You must receive a STEM OPT recommendation I-20 BEFORE applying through the mail or online to USCIS. Applying too early or without first receiving a STEM OPT I-20 could cause the rejection or denial of your application by USCIS.

AM I ELIGIBLE?

In order to be eligible for the 24-month OPT STEM extension, you must:

- Already be on post-completion OPT and hold an appropriate degree in one of the [DHS-approved STEM fields](#).
- Be employed by, or have a job offer from, an employer who is registered with the E-Verify employment verification system. E-Verify is an Internet-based system operated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in partnership with the Social Security Administration. Employment must be paid and full time (21+ hours per week).
- Have fewer than 90 days of unemployment while on OPT.
- Submit the OPT application to USCIS prior to the expiration of the current post-completion OPT. USCIS must receive the application before the expiration date on the current EAD.

WHEN AND HOW SHOULD I APPLY?

Follow the steps below to request a new STEM OPT recommendation I-20 from our office

I am applying for my first 24-month extension

You are eligible to apply for your full 24-month STEM benefit as long as USCIS receives your STEM OPT application prior to your 12-month OPT period expiring. You may apply up to 90 days prior to your 12-month OPT expiration date (printed on your EAD).

Please note, USCIS must receive your application no later than 60 days immediately following the date on page 1 (where the DSO has signed), or the date your current OPT EAD card expires, whichever is sooner.

I am applying for my second STEM Extension

Students may apply for a second STEM extension on the basis of a previously conferred degree OR after completing a new STEM eligible degree at a higher education level. If you have questions about your specific second STEM extension eligibility, contact international@sau.edu

For application based on a prior STEM degree: This can be used in situations where a student obtains a B.S. in Chemistry and then earns an MBA. If the student is on 12-month OPT following the MBA degree, they may apply for a second STEM extension if they obtain a position relating to the field of chemistry for the STEM extension period of employment

authorization. Students would need to apply for this prior to the MBA 12-month OPT period ending.

For application based on a STEM eligible degree at a higher education level: In this case, the student would need to apply for and use the original 12-month OPT for the degree level, then apply for the second 24-month STEM extension prior to the 12-month OPT period ending.

STEP-BY-STEP APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1 – Complete the I-765

If you will apply for the STEM extension through the paper-based application, you can find the Form I-765 [here](#). We recommend you also complete the [Form G-1145](#) so that you will receive free e-notifications of your application status. You do not need to complete the I-765 paper form if applying online, however the information below may be useful when completing the online application (Remember, do not apply online until you receive your STEM I-20!)

Paying your I-765 Fee

There is a USCIS filing fee for the STEM Extension application. You can pay this fee by check or money order made out to USCIS.

Step 2 – Complete the Form I-983 with Your Employer

Please note, you do not need to include this form in your application to USCIS; however, in order for the Office of International Education to issue you an I-20 recommending the STEM extension, we must have a completed [Form I-983](#).

You MUST complete the form with your employer before submitting your request for an I-20 to the Office of International Affairs. Please note that the I-983 must be signed in ink, per form instructions.

[Specific guidance for your employer can be found here.](#)

Step 3- Gather Your Other Documentation

As part of your STEM OPT Extension application, you will need to supply USCIS with copies of the documents below. Make sure you gather these documents as soon as possible, so that your application is not delayed.

- Copy of your most recent electronic I-94 record OR copy of the front and back of your current paper I-94 card
- Copy of your passport identification page (and any renewal pages)
- Copy of your most recent F-1 visa stamp
- Copy of the front and back of your current OPT card (EAD)
- Letters from all of your OPT employers confirming your employment, including start and end dates and average hours worked per week (to prove you have not

used more than 90 days of unemployment) OR first and last pay receipts and offer letters from all of your OPT employers, if you cannot get employment letters.

- Evidence of STEM degree (this can be an unofficial transcript printed from one.iu.edu, an official transcript St. Ambrose University's registrar, or a copy of your diploma)

Step 4 – Request Your Stem OPT Extension

Contact the Office of International Education at international@sau.edu to formally request your STEM OPT Extension and receive your STEM I-20

Step 5 – Submit Your STEM OPT Extension Application

USCIS must receive your application no later than 60 days immediately following the date on page 1 of your I-20 (where the DSO has signed), or the date your current OPT EAD expires, whichever is sooner.

If submitting a paper-based application, you should be careful to send your packet to the proper address for the shipping method you have chosen; you can find the [proper mailing addresses here](#). For online applications, you can submit using the "apply online" button found on the [USCIS I-765](#) webpage.

Step 6- Receive Your Receipt Notice and Wait

Once USCIS has received your application, they will send you a receipt notice.

You will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending with USCIS, until it is approved or denied, or for 180 days, whichever comes first. You should continue reporting your employment information to the Office of International Education during your OPT STEM extension.